

Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

October 2007



Vol. 2, Issue 4

Greetings,

We would like to introduce our new Consul General in Northern Ireland, Susan Elliott. She assumed her duties as Principal Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Belfast in late September.

Susan Elliott is a career member of the Foreign Service. She has just completed a Washington assignment as a Deputy Executive Secretary. During her tenure in the Executive Secretariat, Ms. Elliott's main areas of regional responsibility



U.S. Consul General Susan Elliott

included Europe and South and Central Asia. It was her job to coordinate all of Secretary Rice's travel to Europe. She has also served in Greece, Russia and Peru, as well as working in a variety of Washington assignments. While Ms. Elliott is a political officer,

she has extensive experience in the economic, consular and management fields. Ms. Elliott speaks Greek, Russian and Spanish.

Susan has a Ph.D. from Indiana University and is married to Matthias Mitman who is also a Foreign Service Officer. They have two children.

She is enthusiastic about the challenges ahead and is looking forward to meeting and working with the people of Northern Ireland.

Danesfort House: History Past and Present

Along with a new Consul General, we are also happy to introduce a new format and a new name for our American Citizen Services newsletter. Our new name reflects the Consulate General's lovely home, Danesfort House.

Danesfort House, originally called Clanwilliam House, has an old and prestigious history. Designed in 1864 by William Barre for Samuel Barbour, a linen manufacturer, the house consists of Italian, French and English styles all rolled into one beautiful structure. Barre was one of a number of prominent Ulster architects who worked in the Malone and Stranmillis area. The house remained in the Barbour family until 1940's. It was then resold to the Northern Ireland Electricity Board until

it came to be the home of the U.S. Consulate General in January 2004.

We hope you like the new look of our newsletter. We will continue to do our best to provide the American citizens



living, working or visiting Northern Ireland with useful and up-to-date information. And, if you ever need to visit the Consulate General at Danesfort House you will have an opportunity to see one of the loveliest Consulates we have!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

UK Student Visas	2
Spotlight—Voting Information	3
Federal Benefits/Social Security	4
Immigration Information	5
FBI's Most Wanted	6
Culture Corner	7
Kids Corner	8

Danesfort Dispatches

Department of
State

U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL BELFAST

DANESFORT
HOUSE

223 STRANMILLIS
ROAD

BELFAST BT9 5GR

PHONE: 02890386100
American Citizen
Services - ext. 4104

FAX: 02890 681301

Email:

Consularbelfast@state.gov

Website:

<http://london.usembassy.gov>



U.S. Passport Services Back to Standard Processing Time

The Department of States has announced that it has restored domestic passport services to the standard six to eight week processing time for routine passport applications, and no more than three weeks for expedited services.

While the delay did not affect the issuances and renewals of U.S. passports overseas, many of you may have heard about the backlog in issuing and renewing passports in the U.S. The Department has issued over 16 million passports in fiscal year 2007, which ended on September 30, compared to 12.1 million issued in fiscal year

2006. Throughout the summer, dedicated Department staff in Washington and to the nation's 18 passport agencies have worked tirelessly to eliminate the delays in processing that had developed earlier in the year.

The Department plans to expand passport facilities and continue to hire more passport specialist in order to increase production capacity and meet rising passport demand expected in coming years, as passport requirements are extended to land and sea borders. By January 2008, the Department will have hired hundreds of new employees and production capacity at the

National Passport Center in New Hampshire, the largest passport facility, will have doubled. Longer-term expansion plans include new passport facilities strategically located to enhance customer service around the United States.

For information on passport services at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast, go to <http://London.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html>.



Holiday Travel? Register Your Trip!

Travel registration is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to American citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. Registration allows you to provide the Department of State with information we can use to assist you in case of an emergency. Americans residing abroad can also receive routine information from the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate by registering. Many of you reading this newsletter are already registered with us as a long- or short-term American resident of the United Kingdom, but have you considered registering with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for trips abroad? The Department of State has more than 200 Embassies and Consulates around the world, ready to assist you if needed. To register, visit the State Department's travel registration website at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/>.

New UK Student Visa Requirements

For many years, American citizens coming to the UK for any reason other than tourism for a period of more than six months have been required to have a work permit or entry clearance certificate issued by a UK Embassy or Consulate abroad in advance of travel. Short-term students, i.e., those who would be studying for less than six months in the UK, were often able to enter the UK without entry clearance.

New rules, however, came into effect on September 1, 2007. The new rules require short-term students - those intending to remain for less than six months - to obtain mandatory entry clearance from a British Embassy or Consulate, before departure from the U.S. Under the new rules:

Students coming for six months or more **MUST have PRIOR entry clearance**.

Students coming for fewer than six months and who wish to work up to 20 hours per week during term time **MUST have PRIOR entry clearance**. At present, the Home Office views internships (i.e., British work placements) whether for course credit or not as work.

Students coming for fewer than six months and who have no intention to work—paid or unpaid (which includes participation in a work placement/internship) - will be given entry clearances as a "Student Visitor" by the immigration officer at the port of entry. In this particular circumstance, entry clearance as a student will still be required, but it does not have to be obtained from a British Embassy or Consulate prior to departure from the U.S.

You can find further information on these and other important UK visa topics at www.ukvisas.gov.uk.



Spotlight : Voting Information for the 2008 Elections

In just three months we will be entering the U. S. presidential primary season. Five primaries are currently slated for January and another 20 are scheduled for February. Registration for the first primary (the District of Columbia) closes December 10, 2007. We encourage you to act now so that your opinion is heard! The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website www.fvap.gov.

Generally, all U.S. citizens 18 years or older who are or will be residing outside the United States during an election period are eligible to vote absentee in any election for Federal office. This includes primary, run-off and special elections that occur throughout the year, as well as the general election in November 2008. Some states allow overseas voters to vote in elections for state and local offices, and for state and local referendums.

Voting eligibility and residency requirements are determined by the various U.S. states. Your "**legal state of residence**" for voting purposes is the state where you last resided immediately prior to departure from the United States. Voting rights extend to overseas citizens even though they may no longer own property or have other ties to their last state of residence and even if their intent to return to that state may be uncertain. For those who have never resided in the U.S., sixteen states, to date, allow eligible U.S. citizens to register where a parent would be eligible to vote.

To register to vote and/or apply for an absentee ballot you can use the Federal Post Card Application (www.fvap.gov/services/fpca.html). The on-line version, the OFPCA, is accepted by all states and territories, except American Samoa and Guam. The on-line OFPCA form must be completed legibly, printed, signed, dated and mailed to your Local Election Official. Your state may allow for faxing to speed the process but you will still need to send in the original by mail. Use an envelope and affix proper postage. The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance, www.fvap.gov, has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the state-specific instructions for completing the FPCA form, links to state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot for use by those who register in time but fail to receive an official ballot.

As a general rule, you should try to send in the FPCA so that it reaches your local election officials at least forty-five days before election day-- ample time for them to process the request and send you a blank ballot. If applying for both registration and an absentee ballot, you may want to mail the FPCA earlier. One FPCA will qualify you to receive all ballots for Federal offices for the next two regular general elections (through 2010). However, we recommend that you submit a FPCA in January of every year and whenever you move, to ensure that your most recent mail and e-mail addresses are on file with your local election officials.

Under normal circumstances, most states and territories begin mailing ballots to overseas citizens 30-45 days before an election. However, if you haven't received your ballot within three weeks of your state's ballot receipt deadline, you should download, complete, sign, date and send in a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), available at www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefwab.html. Make sure it is witnessed if required by your state. If you subsequently receive your regular absentee ballot, execute it regardless of when you receive it. Court decisions sometimes require the counting of ballots voted by Election Day, but received by Local Election Officials for a certain period of time following Election Day.

Contact Information

The **Voting Assistance Officer** at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast is also always available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, call 02890 386104 or send an e-mail to VoteBelfast@state.gov.



Danesfort Dispatches

Department of
State

U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL BELFAST

DANESFORT
HOUSE

223 STRANMILLIS
ROAD

BELFAST BT9 5GR

PHONE: 02890386100
American Citizen
Services - ext. 4104

FAX: 02890 681301

Email:

Consularbelfast@state.gov

Website:

<http://london.usembassy.gov>



Federal Benefits: A Family Program for All Ages

The Social Security program is one that touches every American, of all ages, incomes, and races. The program even reaches beyond America.

The Social Security program provides a complete package of protection often not found in the private sector. Most people think of Social Security as a retirement program. Many forget that Social

Security also provides benefits to young workers and their families if they become disabled or the worker passes away.

Also, if you have worked in the United States and are now approaching age 62 and retired, you may want to contact the Federal Benefits Unit not only about your eligibility to benefits, but about those of a spouse and/or young children.

As always, when you correspond with the Federal Benefits Unit, please include your Social Security Number in your correspondence. For more information about all the services provided, visit the Federal Benefits Unit website at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/fbu/index.html.

Social Security Advice: Make Sure Your Information Matches Ours

It is important to regularly check your records to make sure that the name and number on your Social Security card matches with the name and number you are using elsewhere. If you don't, it could cost you time, money and effort to resolve. Your Social Security number and the name on your Social Security card are often used by companies and government agencies as a way to check your identity. If anything is amiss, you could have a problem. This is especially true for people who have recently changed their names, such as new brides or adopted children. Here are a few examples of situations where mismatches can cause trouble.

Timely tax refunds - The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) checks your return against your Social Security records. If your name and number does not match, it could mean a delay in your tax refund or trouble with the IRS.

Your vote counts - but not if your voter registration records do not match. Don't go to the polls only to discover that you do not have permission to vote because of a mismatch.

Leave the driving to us - You will have to if you can't renew your drivers' license due to a name and Social Security number mismatch with your state's Department or Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

Payroll problems - Make sure your employer and human resources department are using the correct name and Social Security number. Not only could it be a red flag to your employer when your identity does not match, it could affect your future Social Security benefits.

Credit where credit is due - If your earnings are not reported to Social Security under your correct name and number, you may not get the earnings credits you are due -- and that could translate to lower benefit payments in your future. Such earnings discrepancies can be corrected, but it can cause an inconvenient delay when you file for benefits.

For more information, go to www.ssa.gov or contact the Federal Benefits Unit at the London Embassy at 0207 499- 9000, choose Option 2, then Option 6.

Concerned About Money for Retirement?

Do you sometimes wonder whether you will be able to afford retirement? It is a common concern among all workers. You should be able to relieve at least some of the concerns about retirement income by understanding just how much money is needed, and then planning a way to reach that goal.

If you want to learn more about how and why to save, you should visit www.mymoney.gov, a government website dedicated to teaching all Americans the basics of financial management. The topics discussed at this website include paying for an education, starting a small business and, of course, retirement planning.

Danesfort Dispatches

Department of
State

U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL BELFAST

DANESFORT
HOUSE

223 STRANMILLIS
ROAD

BELFAST BT9 5GR

PHONE: 02890386100
American Citizen
Services - ext. 4104

FAX: 02890 681301

Email:

Consularbelfast@state.gov

Website:

<http://london.usembassy.gov>



American Citizen Services - Your FAQ's

Q: I married an American citizen ten years ago and we have lived in the UK since then. We are now trying to relocate to the States, could you advise me on how to obtain an American visa? Is there a time factor?

A: If you wish to take up residence in the U.S. with your U.S. citizen spouse, you must obtain an immigrant visa before traveling. The wait time for a spouse (an immediate relative) is the length of time it takes to process the petition, prepare for the interview, conduct the interviews and finalize the case. While the processing time is affected by many factors, currently such applications are taking at least six months to process if the U.S. citizen petitioner is resident in the UK, longer if s/he is resident in the U.S. or elsewhere.

Your spouse, the U.S. citizen, can file an immigrant visa petition (form I-130) with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to accord you immediate relative (IR-1) immigrant status. The USCIS at Embassy London processes I-130 petitions from U.S. citizens who have permission to reside AND who do principally reside in the UK. You can download the form I-130 together with instructions on how to file from <http://london.usembassy.gov/dhs/uscis/i130filing.html>. The I-130 filing fee is \$355. The processing time for an I-130 petition in London at the time of writing is two months. The approved petition will be transferred to the Immigrant Visa Unit at Embassy London.

The Immigrant Visa Unit will send an Instruction Package for Immigrant Visa Applicants. You will find information about the documents contained in the package and how to complete them on our website at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/iv/ivprocess.html.

Approximately three to four months should be allowed for the administrative processing of the immigrant visa application by the Immigrant Visa Unit. Within 4 - 6 weeks of the Immigrant Visa Unit completing action on a case, they will contact you with a date for the formal visa interview and medical examination.

You will find information about the medical examination and fees on our website at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/iv/medexam.html.

The visa processing fee is \$380.00 or sterling equivalent. Visa applicants pay the fee on the day of the visa interview. Visa processing takes 3 - 5 workdays.

Immigrant visas are valid for travel to the U.S. for six months from the date on which they are issued.



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fee Changes

When an American citizen wants to have an immediate relative, i.e., a spouse, child, or parent, or U.S. Resident Alien wants to have an immediate relative, i.e., a spouse or child, immigrate to the United States, he or she must file a petition with the USCIS for the relative. USCIS application and petition fees changed effective July 30, 2007. The petitions and applications accepted by the London Field Office include: the I-130, Petition for Alien Relative (new fee \$355); I-600A, Advance Application for Adopted Orphans (new fee \$670); and the I-601, Application for Waiver of Grounds of Inadmissibility (\$545). Applications or petitions postmarked or otherwise filed on or after July 30 must include the new fee. USCIS will reject applications or petitions containing an incorrect fee. USCIS announced the new fee schedule in May 2007 following a comprehensive review of nearly 4,000 public comments.

More information about the new fee schedule can be found at the USCIS website <http://www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/FinalFeeReminder30Jul07.pdf> or see the USCIS fee schedule at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/natedocuments/FinalUSCISFeeSchedule052907.pdf>.

Danesfort Dispatches

Department of
State

U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL BELFAST

DANESFORT
HOUSE

223 STRANMILLIS
ROAD

BELFAST BT9 5GR

PHONE: 02890386100

FAX: 02890 681301

American Citizen
Services - ext. 4104

Email:

Consularbelfast@state.gov

Website:

<http://london.usembassy.gov>



Diversity Visa Green Card Lottery 2009

The Congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available 50,000 permanent resident visas annually by random selection. Lottery entry is limited to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S. The DV-2009 Lottery online entry begins at Noon EDT on October 3, 2007 and ends at Noon EST on December 2, 2007. Information and instructions for the DV-2009 lottery can be found at www.dvlottery.state.gov and http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1318.html.

The program is administered directly from the U.S. Department of State Kentucky Consular Center (KCC) in Williamsburg, Kentucky. The Kentucky Center was established in the year 2000 by the U.S. Department of State to take over administration of the Diversity Visa Lottery program from the National Visa Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The KCC has continued the excellent tradition of quality service to all applicants of the DV Lottery program.

PLEASE NOTE: The Department of State has only one Kentucky Consular Center. Other organizations using similar names have no connection to the Department of State or KCC. There is no fee charged by the Department or the KCC for sending an entry to the lottery program. Applicants selected in the Diversity Visa random drawing are notified by the Department of State, Kentucky Consular Center by letter, NOT by e-mail and are provided instructions on how to proceed to the next step in the process. No other organization or company is authorized by the Department of State to notify Diversity Visa lottery applicants of their winning entry. A Diversity processing fee is only charged when a winning lottery entrant applies for the Diversity visa. At the time of the visa application at a U.S. consular office, each applicant (the DV entrant and any accompanying family members) will be charged a DV processing fee and immigrant visa fee. Both of these are non-refundable even if the visa is refused. If the visa is issued, a separate visa issuance fee is then charged for each visa. For more information on DV Fraud see the State Department site http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1749.html and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission website at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt003.shtm.

U.S. Customs & Border Protection 10-Finger Scan Arriving Soon!

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Customs and Border Protection's US-VISIT Program is in the process of transitioning from the collection of two to the collection of 10 fingerprints when foreign travelers enter the United States. By implementing a 10-fingerprint collection standard, the DHS can improve the accuracy with which fingerprints are matched, making the entry process for travelers more efficient, more effective and more reliable. Airports that will test this process include New York's JFK airport and Washington D.C.'s Dulles International Airport.

For more information on Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection issues go to the www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/programs/content_multi_image_0006.shtm, see article under Videos.

Can You Help? Watch This Video!

Have You Seen This Man?

The FBI is asking for your help in identifying a fugitive look-alike. James J. Bulger is wanted for 21 counts of organized crime-related murder, and he's on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. Bulger is believed to be somewhere in Europe. Please watch the video (2 minutes 25 seconds duration) and see if you can recognize the man in the video.

Go to <http://london.usembassy.gov/rss/index.html#fbi-bulger-19sep07> to watch the video. Please note this link can take a short time to download.

If you have any information relating to this man, please call *UK Crimestoppers* on 0800-555-111 or visit <http://www.fbi.gov/tips>.

Danesfort Dispatches

Department of
State

U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL BELFAST

DANESFORT
HOUSE
223 STRANMILLIS
ROAD
BELFAST BT9 5GR
PHONE: 02890386100
American Citizen
Services - ext. 4104

FAX: 02890 681301

Email:
Consularbelfast@state.gov

Website:
<http://london.usembassy.gov>



Recent Toy Recalls from U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

In August and September the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announced a recall of Fisher-Price and Mattel toys. The recalled toys were manufactured in China between April 19, 2007 and July 6, 2007. Surface paints on the toys could contain excessive levels of lead which are toxic if ingested by young children. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) has more information on the latest recalls.

For more information on recalls of a variety of products, go to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prerel.html>

To contact Fisher-Price in the United Kingdom at 016-2850-0303 or via email at helplineuk@mattel.com

For more information, go Mattel's website at <http://service.mattel.com/uk/contact.asp>.

Culture Corner



The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

Belfast Festival at Queens— October 19 - November 4, 2007. Another year, another great program! One of this year's highlights is blues guitarist Sherman Robertson. For details go to www.movinmusic.co.uk/sherman_robertson.htm. For full festival details, go to www.belfastfestival.com/.

Ulster American Folk Park Halloween Event - October 27-31, 2007. Take a tour of the outdoor museum as darkness falls. Ghost stories, ghouls and witches bring the museum to life as you are guided around the houses learning about Hallowe'en past. Sample traditional Ulster and American fayre such as barnbrack, pumpkin and shoofly pie. This is a TICKET-ONLY event so contact 028 8224 3292 for information. Go to www.folkpark.com/whats_on/events/?article=1345 for more details.

American Citizen Services:

In the event of a genuine emergency of a U.S. Citizen, our after hours phone number is 0870 238 5428.

Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General will be closed on the following dates:

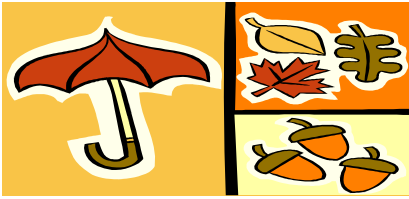
Monday, November 12, 2007 - Veteran's Day

Thursday, November 22, 2007 - Thanksgiving Day

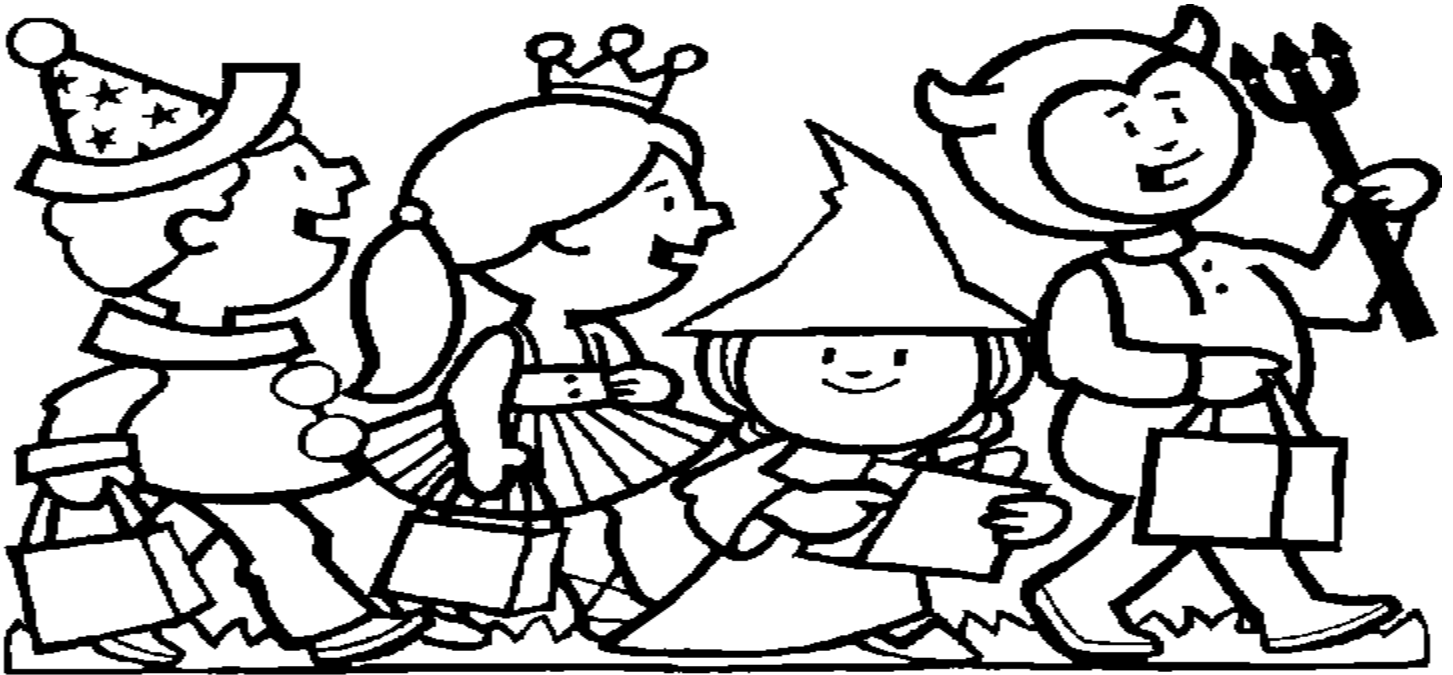
Tuesday, December 25, 2007 - Christmas Day

Wednesday, December 26, 2007 - Boxing Day

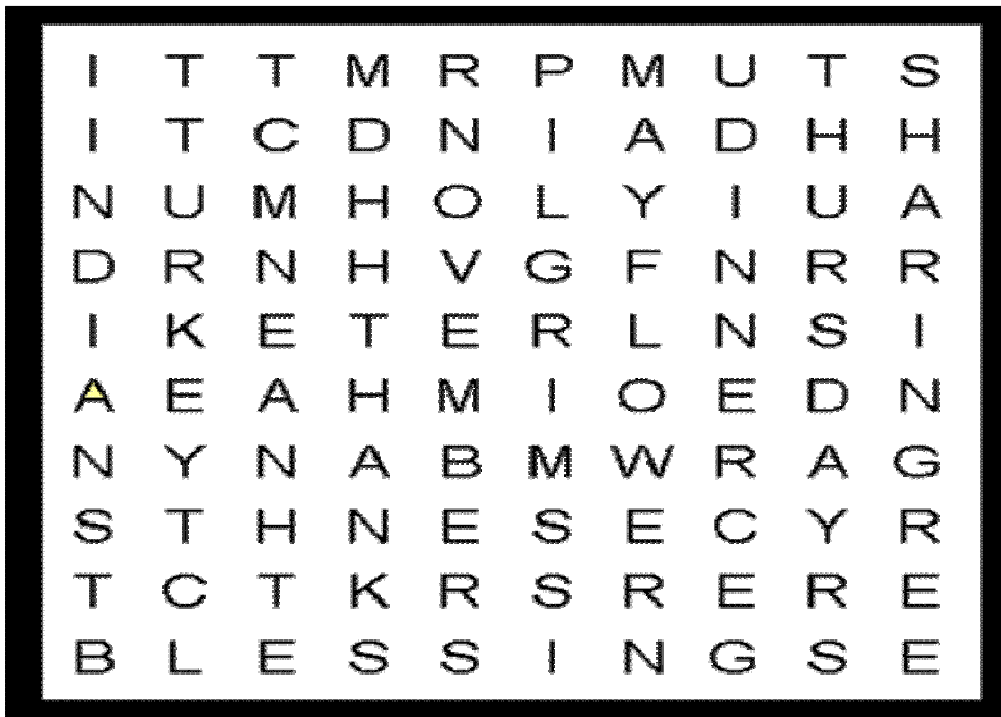
Tuesday, January 1, 2008 - New Year's Day



Kids Corner



Color in the trick-or-treaters in their Halloween costumes!



Thanksgiving Word Search

THANKS
 BLESSING
 DINNER
 THURSDAY
 MAYFLOWER
 INDIANS
 PILGRIMS
 TURKEY
 SHARING
 NOVEMBER